

# Steal This Hook!

## Spawn of Evil

By Robert Wiese



Sometimes the very environment presents opportunities for adventure... in general, however, anything that the natural world seems to offer itself often has some secret, intelligent design behind it. That's the case with the following adventure hooks: something in the natural world is really being caused by creatures of evil.

This month, *Steal This Hook* returns to its roots. The past couple of columns have offered what could more properly be called adventure "ideas," where the source was explained along with the hook itself. This month, the hooks are really hooks, with several different directions for adventure offered in the complications. The following hooks feature opportunities to introduce Spawns of Tiamat into your campaign, as described in *Monster Manual IV*. If you don't have this book, then you may need to alter the monsters (or just go get the book--hey, the spawns of Tiamat are pretty cool!).

### The Haunted Wood -- *Forgotten Realms*

The Wealdath, between Amn and Tethyr, is known for its fey defenders and tribes of elves. It is also the home of monsters and more than a few dragons. It is a large forest, though, and human settlements on the outskirts can scrape by... if there are not too many of them to offend the forest dwellers. One such village, Wayfarn, is close enough to Brost to be able to transport timber there. The villagers subsist on a low-grade timber industry, and live just beyond the reach of the forest's branches; they are used to the forest's normal inhabitants and take care to remain out of reach or on good terms, whichever works best.



The normal noises of the forest do not include ghostly moaning and recurring screams. Lately, however, these very sounds have been heard. Woodcutters working at the edge of the forest have reported strange haunting noises, even during the day, and periodic screams. A few hardy souls went to investigate the first time the sounds came, but did not return, nor did the people who went to look for them. The villagers now fear that some ghost treant, ghost dragon, or some other horrific creature is haunting this part of the forest, and they are now too afraid to do anything about it. Timber production is falling off, as the villagers don't know what parts of the wood are safe and what parts are haunted by this new danger.

Krovall Myersim, a merchant in Brost who deals in the timber from Wayfarn, has heard the stories from his suppliers and is very concerned. He seeks hardy souls not afraid of a few moans and groans to find the truth and restore timber production.

### d100 Motivations

01-40 Krovall is being aboveboard and is not hiding anything from the adventurers.

41-80 Some of the villagers have been converted secretly to the worship of Tiamat by the Cult of the Dragon, and are not giving Krovall all the information that is available. The adventurers are in for some surprises.

81-00 A group of dragonborn of Bahamut (see *Races of the Dragon*) has learned of the greenspawn presence and is watching it to see what the evil creatures are up to. Whether they are friend or foe to the adventurers depends on many factors.

### d100 Complications

01-60 The haunting is caused by a new group of greenspawn leapers (or razorfiends, if you want higher level encounters) that have moved into the area. They are associated with the Cult of the Dragon and seek to extend Tiamat's dominion in the area.

61-75 Fey creatures intent on keeping humans out of the Wealdath harass the adventurers throughout their mission, not wanting to kill them so much as drive them out of the forest.

76-85 There are dragons in the forest that are not involved with the greenspawn, but would not like to be bothered or associated with the spawn activities.

86-00 The sounds are being caused by a banshee (from *Monster Manual II*). The greenspawn razorfiends know that it is in the vicinity and use its presence to camouflage their own presence.

## The Treasure Marsh -- Eberron

The Shadow Marches are a mysterious place where few dare go. Swampland covers much of the area, and reclusive orcs and humans populate the habitable places. House Tharashk controls interaction with the outside world through the port at Zarash'ak, but the inner parts of the area remain isolated. Only the large deposits of Eberron dragonshards draw any here at all.

### Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. You might find any of the following books useful to flesh out this adventure: *Races of the Wild*, *Races of the Dragon* and *Champions of Ruin*. If you bring in actual green dragons, you may also want to consult *Draconomicon*.

**Eberron:** This adventure fits very well in Karrnath, at the edge of the Karrnwood far from the main timber activities. It also fits well in Xen'drick.

**Generic:** This adventure requires a deep woods near small towns or villages. Ideally, the people are somewhat isolated and only see larger civilization every few weeks or months.

**d20 Modern:** You could set this adventure in New England, or parts of Russia or sub-Saharan Africa.





House Orien would like to break House Tharashk's stranglehold on all commerce, and for the past 10 years or so has been working with the native orcs and humans to bypass House Tharashk controls. House Orien has established a trade road from the community of Patrahk'n to Zarash'ak to the south, and this connection has brought goods into Patrahk'n and has begun to raise the quality of life there. House Orien hopes to connect this road with their trade road in Droaam, and thus be able to move Eberron dragonshards out of the nation without House Tharashk interference.

The new trade road through the swamps is dangerous to travel, even with House Orien guards and patrols. Over the years, caravans have disappeared into the swamps, never to be seen again. House Orien counts on some small loss, and one or two caravans a year is within their acceptable limits.

This past year, it has been dry in parts of the Shadow Marches, and the swamp has receded a bit. Rumors started of the lost caravans resurfacing when a lone orc staggered into Patrahk'n claiming to have found a huge pile of wagons loaded with dragonshards. He even had a dragonshard or three to validate his claim. Unfortunately, he'd wandered for days in the swamps and did not remember the exact location of the wagons. Since then, several groups have gone into the swamps looking for them, but to no avail. The swamps of the Shadow Marches are loathe to give up their secrets, even when receded.

House Orien is especially interested in finding the wagons, and more importantly discovering what happened so that they can make the roads safer. House Tharashk is also interested, chiefly so they can claim the lost dragonshards and force House Orien out of the Marches. Both can afford to bring in adventurers to look into the problem.

## d100 Motivations

01-75 House Orien or House Tharashk (or both) wants the adventurers to find the lost caravan wagons. House Orien wants to know what happened to them, but House Tharashk is less interested unless the knowledge can be used against House Orien.

76-90 Envoys from the Daughters of Sora Kell approach the heroes about investigating the rumors of the treasure wagons. Not only would they like the dragonshards, but they had hopes for increased trade once the House Orien trade road connected Droaam with Zarash'ak. They say they would like to see the trade road go forward, and helping House Orien in this matter would ease the way toward what they want.

91-00 A band of local orcs hooks up with the adventurers to help them find the wagons so that the dragonshards can be returned to the ground where they came from. These orcs--druids and rangers mostly--believe in the Draconic Prophecy, and are sure that the deposits of dragonshards relate in some important way. The keys to part of the Prophecy may be lost if more dragonshards are

## Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. You might find any of the following books useful to flesh out this adventure: *Races of the Wild*.

**Forgotten Realms:** This adventure works well in Mortik Swamp, down by Luiren, or even in the Akhkaur Swamp by Lapaliya. Blackspawn raiders would be well at home in the far south, near where a very powerful black dragon wizard lives in Rethild, the Great Swamp.

**Generic:** Set this in a place where civilization has to bypass or cross a swamp, moor, or wetlands area conducting trade between nations or cities or feudal lords. The blackspawn raiders are trying to disrupt the trade.

taken out of the Shadow Marches.

## d100 Complications

01-50 The caravan wagons were attacked and raided by groups of blackspawn raiders that live deep in the swamps. They were not threatened until the House Orien trade road was established. Further, their natural desire to kill dragonmarked beings leads them to try to disrupt House Orien efforts as much as possible.

51-65 Orcs loyal to the Daughters of Sora Kell are also seeking the lost wagons, as the Daughters of Sora Kell had wanted to steal the dragonshard shipments once they began coming through Droaam. The orcs could be accompanied by blackspawn stalkers, chuuls, medusas from Droaam, or even wyverns.

66-80 The Shadow Marches are full of manifest zones between Eberron and Xoriat (the Realm of Madness), and between Eberron and Kythri (the Churning Chaos). Monsters from these places could have recently come through and attacked the caravans.

81-00 Will o'wisps haunt the swamps as well, feeding off the fears of the local orcs and monsters. The House Orien trade road has opened up more feeding possibilities, and they have begun to cluster toward the road.

Note: you might find the sample blackspawn raider encampment from *Monster Manual IV* useful for this adventure.

**d20 Modern:** The Florida Everglades are a good place for this adventure, as they are sometimes dry and sometimes very wet and impassable. There are communities on all sides, so travel across or around the swamps is common. The blackspawn raiders could have come through a gate from some fantasy world, and may just be discovering the nature of their new world through the goods they take from the trucks they attack.

## The Burning Wood -- *Forgotten Realms*

The Forgotten Forest is a small patch of woods some 90 miles long and 30 miles wide. It is a fragment of the great forest that covered this part of Faerûn ages ago, and is now home to reclusive treants that protect it and mourn the loss of the rest of the forestland. Very little happens in the forest that the treant guardians cannot handle, and visitors are rarely welcomed.



Some 20 miles away lies the elven city of Evereska, the last large settlement of moon and sun elves in Faerûn. One night, the adventurers visiting this elven stronghold see an orange glow coming from the Forgotten Forest. As folks begin to wonder what magic is causing it, a fey creature reaches Evereska and claims that the forest is on fire. The fire is spreading out of control; when the treants and druids put out one conflagration, the fire erupts in a new place. They don't have time to track down why this is happening, and the treants have reluctantly asked the elves of Evereska for assistance. The elves immediately begin relief and search-and-rescue plans, and draft the adventurers to help with or without their consent (they don't force the adventurers to help; they just assume that the adventurers will help and start including them in the plans). If necessary, the elves will offer rewards (perhaps on behalf of the treants) for the adventurers' assistance.

Once in the forest, the adventurers discover that the woods have been burned beyond what anyone imagined. Miles and miles of trees are ablaze, with treants and fey creatures desperately working to stem the tide of flames. Soon after the elves and adventurers begin work to control the fire (or soon after the adventures begin to seek out the reason for the blaze), a new area of trees suddenly bursts into flames.

## d100 Motivations

01-50 The treants are desperate for help. They are not hiding anything, and they are not causing the fire.

51-80 A faction of the elves believes the treants have turned evil and need to be purged. Though they did not start the fire, these elves would use it to accomplish their goals of purifying the Forgotten Forest. These elves slow relief efforts and hinder firefighting as subtly as they can. Whether the treants really are evil or not doesn't matter; the elves could be corrupted and the treants innocent, and they would still hinder the rescue efforts.

81-00 The Black Network introduced redspawn firebelchers to the forest to cause this destruction as a way to weaken both the forest creatures and the elves of Evereska. While the elves are focused on this fire catastrophe, the Zhentarim are pulling off some other plan.

## d100 Complications

01-75 The fires are caused by a group of redspawn firebelchers that are hunting. They are the guard animals of a group of redspawn arcanisses based in the southeast part of the Graypeak Mountains at present. The whole group is moving through, but the firebelchers needed to stop here and eat.

76-85 Deep within the forest lives a half-dragon (red) treant of immense age and power. Normally it shuns the other treants, as they fear it, but the fires have attracted it. Though a treant, it is dominated by its draconic heritage and wants to see all forests destroyed.

86-00 Within the Graypeak Mountains, redspawn arcanisses and firebelchers are at war with a group of evil stone giants. Though both sides are evil, the collateral damage from the fighting is affecting other creatures that need protection. That is the cause of the fire; spillover from a large battle.

## Alternate Rewards

The heroes could be offered a number of rewards from the elves and treants for their assistance. Straight cash or magic items could be dull though, so consider these options.

## Campaign Adaptation

Here are some suggestions for different campaign worlds. *Races of the Wild* will give you information on elves in general, and you should consult page 87 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for information on handling forest fires. Once the heroes move into the Graypeak Mountains, you might find *Races of Stone* useful as well.

**Eberron:** The Eldeen Reaches are a natural location for this adventure, as the treants and other necessary creatures are present and the redspawn creatures could be moving through looking for enemies of Tiamat. Redspawn firebelchers live in Xen'drik, so that continent is a good setting as well.

**Generic:** Ideally, you should create a forest with treant occupants next to a hill or mountain range with a city somewhere close by. If not, a town or village will work for the city, and the mountains are not required as the redspawn arcaniss and firebelchers don't live in mountains. The forest fire, on a grand scale, is the centerpoint of the hook.

**d20 Modern:** There are a lot of possibilities for this hook in the modern world. Forests in Africa or North America are perfect, but forests in Europe work just as well. Modern day firefighting tactics and equipment should change the flow of the adventure somewhat, as the fire can be brought under control faster than in a fantasy world. The redspawn creatures would be Shadow creatures brought through a gate in the center of the forest or in some nearby corporate facility from which they escaped.



- Elven wizards could offer adventuring spellcasters access to rare spells that only the elves know.
  - Elven smiths could offer to make elven chain mail or special weapons for the adventurers, in lieu of gold.
  - An elven sage could offer his only copy of a treasure map to an old elven treasure chamber deep within Myth Drannor, sparking the heroes to investigate the greatest dungeon in all Faerûn.
  - The treants could offer to grant aid in reaching an old wise druid that lives deep within the Forgotten Forest, should the heroes need or want to speak with him. This works well if you set up the druid as the reason the heroes are in the region in the first place.
  - Deep within the forest lies a *portal* that leads to the key to a powerful lost Netherese artifact. The treants keep the location of the *portal* secret even from the elves, but will show the heroes where it is and how to use it in return for their help.
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## About the Author

**Robert Wiese** entered the gaming hobby through the Boy Scouts and progressed from green recruit to head of the most powerful gaming fan organization in the world. He served as head of the RPGA Network for almost seven years, overseeing the creation of the **Living Greyhawk** and **Living Force** campaigns, among other achievements. Eventually, he returned to private life in Reno, Nevada, where he spends as much time as possible with his wife, new son Owen, and many pets.

He is still involved in writing, organizing conventions, and playing, and he models proteins for the Biochemistry Department of the University of Nevada, Reno.

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